

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the CT General Assembly,

My name is Sarah McKinnis and I live at 301 Sasco Hill Rd in Fairfield, Connecticut.

I am writing to comment on Draft LCO #3471: An Act Concerning Police Accountability. Over the past months, many of us have had our eyes opened to the horrific realities of police brutality that People of Color live with daily. Connecticut is no exception; CT police have for too long ignored the civil rights of their residents and routinely targeted Black, Indigenous, and people of color with harassment, violence, and criminalization. Due to a lack of accountability and oversight, there have been 21 deaths at the hand of the Connecticut police in the last five years. This is unacceptable.

The drafted legislation represents an important start, and I support all of the included measures, but it falls short of the fundamental overhaul of the system that is needed in order to protect Black, Brown, and poor communities in Connecticut from police violence. For example, this bill amends use-of-force policies, but it should do more by banning chokeholds and similar tactics. In addition, instances of “may” in the legislation should be changed to “shall,” to make this binding. The mental health assessments of police officers is crucial for the safety of all officers and all communities, but these should be conducted annually, rather than every five years as the legislation lays out.

Furthermore, this bill cannot be taken seriously as a good-faith effort to address Connecticut’s police brutality until it intervenes against the violence of the state’s correctional institutions and officers as well as police. Modern incarceration practices have been shown time and time again to be utterly ineffective at rehabilitating and reforming individuals, and incarceration largely exacerbates underlying causes for criminal behavior. For greater oversight and accountability of our state’s correctional institutions, this bill must also include:

1. **Correctional Reform.** Provisions of the bill aimed at holding police accountable **MUST** extend to correctional officers. Just as policing disproportionately damages black and brown communities, prisons disproportionately lock up black and brown people. In Connecticut, 71% of the people in prison are black and brown. In Northern Correctional, the State’s supermax facility, 82% of people are black and brown.
2. **Independent Oversight.** The bill’s draft language calls for the creation of an Inspector General appointed by the Chief State’s Attorney. First, this is not independent oversight as prosecutors work closely with police officers and cannot be considered reliably independent. Second, the Inspector General would not be charged with monitoring and investigating correctional staff performance and institutional policy. The bill’s draft language only covers correctional oversight when investigating a death in the Department of Correction (D.O.C) custody, an absolute bare minimum that should not be considered substantive oversight. Notably, Connecticut is one of the only states that lacks external oversight of the D.O.C.
3. **A Shift in Funding from Corrections to Communities.** The bill’s focus on demilitarization does not go far enough. The bill must explicitly shift funding from policing into communities of color. Likewise, the bill must include a shift in funding

from militarizing and overpopulating the D.O.C. to investing in resources for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Now that the state has drastically reduced the prison population, it is time to have a serious conversation about when and how to begin closing costly prisons, starting with Northern Correctional, a facility recently cited by the United Nations for human rights violations due to the excessive use of solitary confinement.

4. **Banning routine practices that inflict long-term trauma.** The bill's focus on banning practices that inflict wanton and unnecessary violence during police stops is well warranted. Banning these practices is long overdue, but tactics such as chokeholds must also be banned in the Department of Correction. Similarly, the bill should focus on banning solitary confinement, an ineffective practice often understood to be torture, which can inflict lifelong trauma. The bill must also ban the use of prone and in-cell restraints.
5. **Ending Qualified Immunity.** The use of qualified immunity to shield police from civil action is an essential component of this legislation; the abolition of qualified immunity must be extended to correctional officers.

I would like to restate my support for An Act Concerning Police Accountability, because these measures are long overdue. I ask that the General Assembly also works to implement these additional reforms, stands with the communities demanding change, and that each member does their part to bring about change to this system that is, at its core, fundamentally unjust and racist.

Sincerely,
Sarah McKinnis